

AN ANALYSIS OF IMPACT OF SUFISM IN KASHMIR

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Abstract: Kashmir, acknowledged as the “heaven on earth” has been the abode of many mystics, saints and sufis. The paper in study substantiates the impact of these sufi saints and their ideology in Kashmir. These sufi saints played an important role in the Islamization of Kashmir. These sufis hailed from Persia and Central Asia into Kashmir. They not only converted the masses but also brought out a complete socio-economic and moral change in Kashmir. They also laid great emphasis on the education of woman. As a result of their teachings, women’s education received great impetus in the valley. They also played an important role in removing the evil practices from the society. The evil practices like sati system, gambling, dancing of girls and sale of hot drinks were abandoned. These sufi saints asserted that Sufism is the animating spirit of the Islamic tradition and its origin is in the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Later on, some pseudo sufis added some wrong practices in it which do not conform to the tenets of Islam.

Keywords: Sufi, Sayyids, Hamdani, Convert, Sharia, Islam, Monasticism, Wahadatul Wajood, Kashmiri, Innovation, Hadith, Quran.

Introduction:

The word ‘Sufi’ comes from ‘Suf’ which means wool, a reference to woollen robe worn by the earliest sufis. There is no single definition or an approach to Sufi teachings. It is the method through which you can understand reality or ultimate truth. “God is the ultimate reality not this phenomenal world of multiplicity” (Fadiman & Froger, 2009, P.05). According to Sarraj’s classic definition of Sufism; “the Sufi’s are people who prefer God to everything and God prefers them to everything else”. The sufi philosopher Al Ghazzali says, ‘Real self knowledge consists in knowing the following things; what are you in yourself and where do you come from? Where are you going and for what purpose are you tarrying here a while? In what does real happiness and misery consists?’ (Fadiman & Froger, 2009, P.02).

Sufism flourished between the 13th and 16th centuries CE. In Arabic, Sufism is called *Tasawwuf*. One of the chief proponents of Sufism was Sheikh Alau’d-Daula Simnani (736/1336). His teachings played an important role and changed the thinking and tone of writing of a section of Sufis. Many Sufis approved of the doctrine of *Wahadatul Wajood* (Unity of Existence) but Alau’d-Daula was against this doctrine. He also opposed the monkish austerity practiced by some Sufis. He believed that *Wahadatul Wajood* was against the tenets of Islam (Sharia). Today majority of the Muslim scholars reject the concept of *Wahadatul Wajood* (Unity of Existence) introduced by a Sufi saint Ibn’Arabi. They believe that God is separate from His creation and not a part of it. As Allah says in the glorious Quran:

“there is nothing like unto Him & He is the all – hearing and all – seeing.”

(Quran, 112:4)

Allah says in Surah Al-Ikhlās:

“And there is none like unto Him.”

(Quran, 112:4)

These verses clearly indicate that Allah is not like any of its creation.

With the advent of Muslim rule in Kashmir (720/1320) Sufism entered into Kashmir. These Sufis poured from Persia and central Asia into Kashmir. There were basically four Sufi orders in Kashmir – Suharwardi, Kubravi, Naqshbandi and Qadri. The first Sufi to enter Kashmir was Sayyid Sharaf-ud-din Bulbul Shah. He hailed from Turkistan and arrived into Kashmir during the reign of king Suhadeva. He belonged to Suharwardia order of the Sufis. His main contribution to the Islamization of Kashmir was the conversion of the king Rinchin to Islam. His conversion helped Islam to go on a long way in Kashmir.

As many as ten thousand Hindu embraced the creed of Bulbul Shah and there was no stir or resentment of any sort against these conversions. S.A. Qadri writes:

“A revolution of far reaching consequences took place silently and imperceptibly not through the instrumentality of Muslim conqueror but a Tibetan refugee who was born a Buddhist.”

(Qadri, 2002)

The Islamization of Kashmir was further accelerated by the arrival of host of Sayyids well known amongst them are; Sayyid Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Sayyid Taj-ud-din, Sayyid Mas'ud, Sayyid Ali Hamdani. It was Mir Sayyid Ali Hamdani who wielded an extraordinary influence in spreading Islam in Kashmir. In Kashmir he is known as Shah-e-Hamdan. His other name is Amir-i-Kabir and Ali-i-Thani. He was born at Hamdan in Iran. He had studied Islamic theology, was well educated and learnt Sufism under the guidance of a great saint Alau'd-Daula. He also received guidance from a great Sufi saint Alau'd-Daula Simnani. Although he supported Ibn'Arabi's concept of *Wahadatul wajood*. He was forced to leave his place on account of the rise of the Timur and it is said that with 700 disciples he entered Kashmir in 1379 – 80. He belonged to Kubravi order. After entering Kashmir he obtained a great influence over the ruler of Kashmir, Sultan Qutub-ud-din. The conversion of the masses of the valley to Islam was not only furthered but even confirmed by the saint with the help of his prominent co-workers. These Sayyids or Sufi saints associated themselves with the royal courts and took part in the political affairs of the state. They not only occupied the religious positions but also served as ambassadors. Sultan Qutub-ud-din was so influenced by the teachings of Sayyid Ali Hamdani that he abandoned the dressing in Hindu attire and divorced some of his wives whom he had married earlier against Islamic law. Sayyid Ali Hamdani and his team established hospices in the valley which served as centres for the propagation of their religion. The doors of these hospices were open to all whether Muslim or non-Muslim and in the large kitchens of these hospices food was served to needy, inmates and visitors. Another contribution of these Sayyids was the establishment of *Madrassas* (Educational institutions) where the knowledge of Quran, Quranic commentaries, *hadis*, (sayings of Prophet, peace be upon him) *tafsir* (commentary) was propagated. These *madrassas* not only imparted religious education but knowledge of moral and social equality was also imparted which helped the Kashmiris to lead a disciplined and righteous life. Sayyid Ali Hamdani also played an important role in improving the economy of the Kashmir valley by introducing the art and craft techniques of central Asia. On his insistence, Sultan Qutub-ud-din started *Karkhana* (Shawl factories) in Kashmir on the pattern of central Asia factory.

Hindu dominance in the royal courts began to diminish and Sanskrit language which was earlier used in court was replaced by Persian language and many non-muslims started to learn Persian language in order to improve their economic status i.e. employment and promotions. Sayyid Ali Hamdani had influenced many saints and mystics of Kashmir. He is said to have been the contemporary of Lal Ded, the great mystic poetess of Kashmir. It is believed that Lalla has learnt many principles from him which shaped her life as a saint. He also influenced Sheikh Nund Reshi, the great mystic saint of Kashmir and it was under Sayyid's influence that he abandoned the life of recluse and returned to the world of reality. Sheikh abandoned monasticism, Sheikh says,

Going to jungles was a mistake.
I mistook monasticism as a prayer
But it was a big notoriety.
I just had to explore on simple thing.

(Aafaqi, 2004, P.94)

Monasticism finds no place in Islam. Both Allah and His messenger denounced this practice. Allah says in Quran.

“And (as for) monasticism, they innovated it – We didnot prescribe it to them – only to seek Allah’s pleasure, but they didnot observe it with its due observance.

(Quran, 57:27)

Some pseudo Sufis practiced this escapism or monkish austerity which was their own innovation and thus alienates Sufism from Islam.

The Islamic abstemiousness (Zuhd) which means leading a simple life and not become a captive of wealth and rank is no way related to the issue of monasticism.

It is said that Shah-i-Hamdan converted 30,000 people to Islam, mostly these were mass conversions. But it was during the reign of Sultan Sikander (1389-1413) that Sufism gained impetus in the valley. He was much impressed by the teaching of Mir Muhammad, son of Sayyid Ali Hamadani who continued the mission of his father. The prime minister and commander of the military force, Malik Suhabhata was impressed by the personality of Mir Muhammad including his simple way of life, he embraced Islam. He adopted the name of Saif-ud-din and under the influence of Mir Muhammad he abandoned the evil practices widespread in Kashmiri society like sale of hot drinks, sati system (Hindu widow who immolates herself on her husband’s funeral pyre), gambling and dancing of girls. This Sufi saint by removing such wicked practices from the society not only helped in the welfare of Muslims but in the welfare of non-muslims too. These Sufi saints not only converted the lower caste Hindus but also Brahmans renounced their faith and accepted Islam. The fact is that their conversion was practically motivated and the spiritual cravings have nothing to do with it. Jonaraja says, “Many Brahmans and people of other castes gave up their faith in order to obtain the favour of the king (Sikandar).” (Kaul’s Rajtarangi of Jonaraja, 1967, P.67)

Another Sufi saint of Suharwardi order was Sheikh Hamza Makhdam. He is popularly known as ‘Mahbubul-Alam’ in Kashmir. He was born in 900/1494 in the district Baramullah of Kashmir. He was against the Shi’ism and restricted the progress Shi’ism in Kashmir. He claimed that Prophet (PBUH) along with his four companions once appeared in his dream and told him that Shi’a practices were wrong and should not associate with them. Many Shi’is were impressed by his teaching and even abandoned their faith. He built various mosques in Kashmir in rural areas where Islamic teachings were propagated. He strongly disapproved of *Sama* (mystical music) which is prohibited in Islam, which has evidence in Quran & Sunnah as well.

Allah says in Quran:

“And of mankind is he who purchases idle talks (i.e. music, singing) to mislead (men) from the path of Allah....”

(Quran, 31:6)

Later many pseudo Sufis approved of *Sama* to the masses on account of that it stimulates love. Such innovations set apart Sufism from the essence of Islam.

These sufi saints also laid emphasis on women education. While highlighting the importance of women education Baba Dawud Khaki says, “It is obligatory on a husband to impart religious Education to his wife and if he does not fulfill it, the woman has every right to move towards a teacher without the permission of her husband to acquire Ilm- i- Sharia. “(khaki, 1937,p.135).

The Naqshbandi & Qadri saints were fewer in number and did not leave lasting impressions in Kashmir.

The rulers & local population of Kashmir out of love and reverence for these saints constructed beautiful shrines in their honour. Because of the immense popularity of these Sufi saints, people used to visit these saints to obtain spiritual blessings. They also started to pay visit to the graves of these saints for seeking their help. Unfortunately these shrines became the places of worship for most of the Kashmiri muslims which is a reprehensible innovation and forbidden practice in Islam, with reference to this *hadith*.

Aa’ishah & Abd-Allah Ibn Abbaas said:

When (death) approached the messenger of Allah (PBUH), he started to cover his face with a cloak of his. When he became distressed he lifted it from his face and said, “May Allah curse jews & the Christians, for they have taken the graves of their prophets as places of worship.” [The narrator said:] he was warning against doing what they did”.

(Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 425, Muslim, 531)

In Islam it is permissible to pray for the person not to the person.

Conclusion:

The Sufi saints played an important role in the Islamization of Kashmir. They also brought about socio-economic and moral changes in Kashmir. It was their endeavour and goal to bring change in the outlook and activism of the people. They tried to build a society as per the Islamic laws. They were determined to eradicate evil and vicious from the society of Kashmir. Their belief was that man should not forget God and be swayed by the pomp and show of the earthly world. To act on the right path was their main concern. It is the faith devised in them after their firm faith in Islam. They also challenged Shi'ism in Kashmir which was started by Mir Shamas-ud-din Iraqi. They denounced Shi'ias as heretics because of their astray beliefs. But later on, because of some wrong practices added by many pseudo Sufi's they deviated it from the domain of Islam.

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